

Abstract

The Master thesis “The Europeanization of a political system of a federal state: the case of Belgium” investigates the Europeanization effect on a federal polity in Belgium. It discusses the relations between the federal government and the federated entities in Belgium. It addresses two questions. Firstly, what is the impact of European integration on the relations between the federal government and the federated entities in Belgium and secondly, does European integration strengthen or rather weaken the role of federal government towards regions and communities. In particular, it argues that the combination of two parallel processes – on the one hand, the deepening of European integration and on the other hand, the domestic devolution of powers in Belgium – resulted in a situation where the position of the federal government is strengthened despite the constant pressure of federated units on decentralization. Using Germany and Austria as typical cases of federations to compare, the thesis assumes that Belgium is an exceptional case of federation. While in Austria and Germany the European integration consolidates the existing relations between federal government and federated entities, in Belgium it completely changes them. It also argues that European integration shapes the dual nature of Belgian federalism into cooperative and strengthens the federal government by establishing hierarchy in Belgian multi-level federal structure. Using the method of process tracing it analyses the institutional conditions and coordination process in four policy areas with a different level of regulation at the EU. It confirms the assumptions that the position of the federal government is indeed strengthened and that the creation of Belgian European policy has clear cooperative character. However, this thesis also claims that these conclusions cannot be generalized to all dual federal systems despite the fact that Belgium is an exceptional case, because there are several important mediating variables influencing the causal link between European integration and the changes in Belgian federal polity.